



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

*Board of* EDUCATION AND SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

**March 15, 2011**

**Testimony of:**

**Brian S. Sigman, CRC**

**Director of Education and Rehabilitation serving as the**

**Acting Executive Director**

**State of Connecticut**

**Board of Education and Services for the Blind**

**RE:**

**Senate Bill 1012 – An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning the Transfer of Functions from the Board of Education and Services for the Blind and the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired to the Departments of Education and Social Services**

**Good morning, Chairman Tercyak, Chairman Musto, and distinguished members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Brian Sigman and I am the Director of Education and Rehabilitation at the Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB), presently serving in an acting capacity as the Executive Director. I am here today in regards to Senate Bill 1012.**

**Connecticut, like most of the nation is in the throes of an unprecedented economic decline. As we are all sadly aware, Connecticut faces a deficit in fiscal year 2012 in excess of \$3 billion. My heartfelt best wishes and deep respect goes to Governor Malloy for accomplishing the monumental task of**

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submitting a balanced budget to the Legislature. It is a tribute to his leadership that he has offered a visionary plan to reshape government, reign in costs and promote our economic recovery.

Most certainly, given the size and scope of the deficit, decisions need to be made that will affect the lives of us all. State government is responsible for so many and varied services, from maintaining our roads and bridges, to protecting our safety and security, to providing a safety net for our most vulnerable citizens. The challenge before us all is to live within our financial means, while ensuring that the most fundamental purposes of our governmental structure can be leveraged to maintain critical services for those of our citizenry who are most in need of assistance. The Governor's budget offers these assurances. In particular for BESB, I am grateful that the Governor's proposal maintains funding for direct service and support staff, along with funding for purchased services that are so vital for people who are blind.

For those of you who are new to the Committee or may not be fully familiar with BESB, the agency provides direct services to help blind people adjust to loss of vision, and to maintain independent and productive lives. Our services span the life of our constituents, and indeed many examples exist of clients who began receiving services as children, and later moved into our vocational program to obtain college degrees and achieve productive careers. Our independent living program staff teach safety techniques to enable senior citizens to remain independent in their homes, therefore avoiding the need for nursing home placement. Last year alone, BESB staff delivered more than 25,000 hours of direct services through agency rehabilitation teachers, mobility instructors, social workers, educators and counselors. In addition, nearly 6,000 hours of support and

outreach services were provided to community partners to foster opportunities in education, employment and community inclusion.

Through the establishment of performance benchmarks by our board of directors, the agency engages in continuous improvement initiatives, and consistently achieves positive outcomes. The agency has a strategic planning committee that includes representatives from organizations of and for the blind as well as agency staff at all levels. This committee has implemented numerous innovative approaches for service delivery to streamline costs and deliver a high quality of services that are reflected in BESB's Results Based Accountability report cards.

Senate Bill 1012 proposes to split BESB's services between the Departments of Education and Social Services, with the Department of Education taking on the responsibilities of the children's programs and the Department of Social Services assuming the leadership of the adult programs of independent living, business enterprises and vocational rehabilitation. Please know that there will need to be technical modifications in several areas in order for the correct successor agency to be named in the bill, and decisions will need to be made regarding which agency amongst the two successor agencies will assume the maintenance of the Blind Registry, that presently reflects clients of all ages from birth through senior years.

These are difficult times, with budget shortfalls that must be addressed, and savings that must be achieved. Our Governor has offered a bold and creative plan that seeks to maintain services for all of our citizenry while at the same time achieving savings that must be achieved. He must be commended for these actions, and recognized for his

**leadership that has put before you proposals that will  
balance this budget for our state.**

**I wish you all the very best in the difficult work that lies  
ahead.**

**Respectfully submitted,**

**Brian S. Sigman, CRC  
Director of Education and Rehabilitation serving as the  
Acting Executive Director  
Board of Education and Services for the Blind**